The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

For release: Immediately
June 9, 1997

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MUSEUM ACQUIRES MAJOR CHUCK CLOSE PAINTING, 19TH-CENTURY FIRE SCREEN, RARE PRINTS & DRAWINGS

(Cleveland, OH) The Cleveland Museum of Art just acquired its most recently created work of art, the major oil painting entitled *Paul III* by contemporary master Chuck Close. At the same time, CMA added to its collection one of the finest examples of furnishings from America's "Gilded Age," a fireplace screen by one of the preeminent furniture makers of that time, Herter Brothers of New York; a newly rediscovered 16th-century drawing by Italian baroque master Annibale Carracci; and a rare lithograph by the recently deceased abstract expressionist painter Willem de Kooning. The Close painting is now on view; the other works will go on view in the museum's recent acquisitions galleries by the end of this week.

Museum director Robert P. Bergman and contemporary art curator Tom E. Hinson each met with Chuck Close in his New York studio while considering the purchase of *Paul III*, a portrait which Close just completed last November. It is 8-1/2 feet tall, and is a characteristic close-up of the face of a sitter from Close's circle of family, friends, and fellow artists. In this case it is the realist painter Paul Cadmus (b. 1904). In this new work, however, Close's trademark grid of colored squares and rectangles is on a 45-degree angle to the edges of the painting; also, this face is more closely cropped than ever, above the brow line, below the lips, and at the cheeks, with only a bit of shoulder in view. As Bergman describes it, "From a distance, this huge painting conveys the sitter's gaze in an intense, frontal way; from up close to the canvas, the hundreds of diamond facets making up the picture are like an abstract kaleidoscope of bright, multi-colored "bull's eyes," concentric loops, and dots of pinks, blues, mauves, oranges, and other hues."

Bergman characterizes Close as an artist with great staying power, a significant presence on the contemporary art scene for some three decades. A medievalist himself, Bergman says he was struck when meeting with the artist by the credit Close gave to the influence of living in Italy and seeing the great mosaics in Rome and Ravenna, such as in the 6th-century church of San Vitale. Hinson says *Paul III* will eventually be displayed near

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works by Jennifer Bartlett, Joel Shapiro, and Susan Rothenberg, adding that these artists "all exploit in their works the tension between realism and abstraction; *Paul III* will add significantly to CMA's collection of recent contemporary art." The painting joins three prints and one photograph by Close already in the collection.

The Herter Brothers fireplace screen is well-known in the field of decorative arts as an exemplar of the opulent "gilded age" of the late 19th century. In excellent condition, it was most likely made in about 1878-80 for a lavishly decorated bedroom in the house of railroad magnate Mark Hopkins and his wife on Nob Hill in San Francisco. In 1891 it was taken to Sherwood Hall in Menlo Park, California, by their heirs and was among the contents of that house sold in 1942. It is made of carved and gilded wood with painted decorations and a central panel covered on one side with an embossed decoration of birds and flowers, made in paper in imitation of leather. The bird and flower picture seems almost certainly Japanese, and likely inspired the creation of this screen and determined its design. Classic Herter elements are a pierced panel and garland of stylized circular flower blossoms with slender oval leaves; its rectilinear lattice work joining the legs; and a pair of extremely attenuated, gaping lion masks at the top of the legs on either side.

Henry H. Hawley, CMA's longtime curator of Renaissance and Later Decorative Arts and Sculpture, remarks that in this screen "the contrasting matte water gilding and burnished oil gilding is particularly striking; subtle carving, well-preserved gilding, and effective pictorial decoration are combined to make this piece one of the best surviving examples of the productions of the distinguished Herter firm." The screen was exhibited in the major 1994-95 exhibition **Herter Brothers: Furniture and Interiors for a Gilded Age**, as was the museum's Herter *Center Table*, acquired in 1987. The screen will join the *Center Table* and a Herter chair in CMA's recently reinstalled galleries of 19th-century American and European art.

Drawings of the quality, size, and finish of the museum's newly acquired *Hercules Resting* are extremely rare. Unknown and unpublished until exhibited in Paris earlier this spring, this study (in black chalk with white heightening) is a major addition to the known work of baroque master Annibale Carracci. According to chief curator Diane De Grazia, "That it is by Annibale, arguably the father of the baroque style, and that it is a study for one of the greatest commissions of its time for one of Rome's best known palaces, makes it a particularly exciting addition to Cleveland's collection of old master drawings; it is possibly the most important Annibale drawing to come on the market in thirty years; most related drawings have been in the collections of the Louvre and Windsor Castle since the 18th century." It is the only known compositional study for Annibale's depiction of *Hercules Resting* from the story of Hercules executed in

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fresco on the ceiling of the Camerino Farnese (in Cardinal Odoardo Farnese's Roman palace) in 1595-97. The artist posed the reclining, muscular figure of the virtuous Hercules much like Michelangelo's Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, and portrayed him surrounded by evidence of his labors; in this study one sees the dagger he holds, and at his feet the three golden apples of the Hesperides and the snout of the Erymanthian boar. Annibale's Hercules contemplates a sphinx in the background, whose inscription may be translated "Toil is the bringer of sweet rest." In addition to the museum's genre painting by this artist, *Boy Drinking*, acquired at auction three years ago, the new acquisition complements one other Annibale work already in the collection, a landscape drawing.

The museum's collections from ancient to modern have also been enriched by these and other acquisitions:

- The print collection now has one of only nine impressions of *Litho #2*, which, with de Kooning's *Litho #1*, constituted the artist's highly experimental first attempt at lithography in 1960. Printed in black ink, *Litho #2* captures the spontaneity of de Kooning's brush moving quickly across the lithographic stone.
- CMA's collection of Maya art, possibly the finest in the U.S., now has an example of blackware pottery from the Early Classic period (AD 250-600) in a *Deer Effigy Vessel*, a thin-walled, elegantly proportioned pedestal bowl in excellent condition.
- A Sumerian stone carving, *Head of a Bull*, joins the museum's most ancient works of art. Carved of bluish, translucent semi-precious chalcedony (a variety of agate) in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and not quite two inches long, it probably comes from the 3rd millennium BC.
- An exceedingly rare trial proof (an early impression after the title was added to the printing plate) of Goya's print, *A Bad Night*, exemplifies Goya's virtuosity as a printmaker. It is from the *Caprichos*, a set of eighty etching and aquatints satirizing the vices and follies of late-18th-century Spanish society. *A Bad Night* is a windblown scene of a conversation between a man and woman.
- Jusepe de Ribera, the major Spanish baroque artist, is now represented in the drawing collection by *Saint Sebastian* (1628-29), universally accepted as an important example of Ribera's style in red chalk, exemplifying also the artist's interest in empathetic and tender depictions of bound martyrs; this work was shown in the New York venue of the major Ribera retrospective in 1992.
- The museum's first example of a full-plate (8 x 5-7/8 inches) daguerreotype is a rare self-portrait by French artist Camille Dolard from around 1843 in which the photographer used props and clothes to

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assume a persona—like Cindy Sherman 135 years later—surrounding himself with materials and tools of his painting trade; it joins three other daguerreotypes in the collection.

Vicomte Joseph de Vigier's salted paper print from a waxed paper negative records in telling detail a portion of the Renaissance town hall in Seville, Spain; acquisition of this well-preserved 1853 photograph makes Cleveland only the third museum in North America to have photographs by Vigier.

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